

Dr. Jonathan V. Wright's

NUTRITION & HEALING

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Think your medical records are private? Think again. New government regulations allow virtually unlimited access to your most personal information —and they don't need your consent!

By Jonathan V. Wright, M.D.

How would you like everyone you know to find out how much you weigh? OK, for a select few people, maybe it wouldn't be so bad. But I know most of you are probably at least a little self-conscious about it and would rather not have the number publicized. Now, if you think that would be bad, imagine how you would feel if all of the details of your last Pap smear, your latest prostate exam, your personal conversations with your doctor, and your prescriptions (for antidepressants, tranquilizers, painkillers—whatever) suddenly became public property.

In just a few days, all of this—and everything else in your medical record—will be available to a virtually unlimited number of people.

How about the last time you were in the hospital? Surgery, heart attack, pneumonia...it doesn't matter. Are you HIV positive? Have you ever been tested for HIV? With just a little effort, any of tens of thousands of medical personnel, insurance company employees, law enforcement officials, researchers, “foreign officials,” FDA officials,

“medical disciplinary” personnel—even your employer—can all find out!

“Like the federal ‘Banking Secrecy Act,’ which allows government agents to demand all details of your banking records without notifying you, the ‘medical privacy’ rules have stripped you naked to the world”

Think I’m kidding? I wish I were...but these “regulations” are already in place, issued in final form on August 9, and will go into effect on October 15, 2002. All of the details were spelled out in a recent issue of the *Federal Register*.¹

What the headlines are really saying about your medical privacy

So, where’s the outrage? Where’s the ACLU? Where’s the series of outraged editorials in *The New York Times*, the *Washington*

Post, or your local newspaper? Newspapers, television, radio... all the media had headlines and announcements in August about these “final rules,” but apparently none of the reporters bothered to actually read them. Instead, most headlines read something along the lines of “Medical privacy rules get tightened.” With headlines like that, you’d think you were better protected against invasions of your medical privacy.

But nothing could be further from the actual truth. Like the federal “Banking Secrecy Act,” which allows government agents to demand all details of your banking records without notifying you, the “medical privacy” rules have stripped you naked to the world.

The shocking details of how you’ll be stripped of your privacy

Let’s go over some of the specifics of the new ruling:

You will not be allowed to withhold any of your personally identifiable health care information, including psychotherapy records and genetic (DNA) information, from the federal Department of

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Our mission:

Nutrition & Healing is dedicated to helping you keep yourself and your family healthy by the safest and most effective means possible. Every month, you'll get information about diet, vitamins, minerals, herbs, natural hormones, natural energies, and other substances and techniques to prevent and heal illness, while prolonging your healthy life span.

A graduate of Harvard University and the University of Michigan Medical School (1969), Dr. Jonathan V. Wright has been practicing natural and nutritional medicine at the Tahoma Clinic in Kent, Washington, since 1973. Based on enormous volumes of library and clinical research, along with tens of thousands of clinical consultations, he is exceptionally well-qualified to bring you a unique blending of the most up-to-date information and the best and still most effective natural therapies developed by preceding generations.

Nutrition & Healing cannot improve on these famous words:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

The inalienable right to life must include the right to care for one's own life. The inalienable right to liberty must include the right to choose whatever means we wish to care for ourselves. In addition to publishing the best of information about natural health care, *Nutrition & Healing* urges its readers to remember their inalienable rights to life, liberty, and freedom of choice in health care. This information is published to help in the effort to exercise these inalienable rights, and to warn of ever-present attempts of both government and private organizations to restrict them.

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Health and Human Services (HHS). The privacy rule mandates that every health care practitioner and professional—including doctors, insurers, health care data processing companies, and the federal government—“share” all of your records without your consent.

I know what you're probably thinking: “Not be allowed’ to withhold personal, private medical information? You really must be exaggerating! This is still the USA, isn’t it?” I promise I’m not exaggerating.

And yes, this means that the FDA can get into your medical record and track down every milligram of every vitamin, mineral, and herb you’re taking—without your consent! In last month’s issue of *Nutrition & Healing*, I told you about the European ruling that will make it illegal for citizens there to obtain or take nutrients without a prescription, and how there is a very real possibility that the same thing could happen in the U.S.. If it does, the FDA can now use its unchecked access to your medical records in order to uncover who’s “breaking the law” by taking (or having taken) vitamins without a prescription.

Not only have they given themselves the right to make your records public without your consent, but it gets even worse:

All your personal information in one easy-to-use, and easy-to-abuse, database

But surely, you can “trust” the government to make sure their new database—made up of your complete medical records—is released without your consent “only” to the tens of thousands of people in the healthcare industry, can’t you? Not a snowball’s chance...Here are just a few examples of how other government database programs have been used and abused:²

- One cop is suspected of using an official database to plan the murder of his ex-wife.
- An Australian cop used the police database to check out potential girlfriends.
- Yet another cop used a police database to obtain a woman’s unlisted phone number.

Abuse of the medical record database will be even easier once the Feds finally get Congress to allow you to be assigned a “Universal Health Identifier” (UHI) number. Then, anyone with the right connections (to government, medical personnel, employees of your health care insurer, or any of the list of tens of thousands of “authorized” individuals) will be able to access and read your complete medical record, and then turn the information over to whoever paid him (or her). And to make matters worse, the government won’t even try to punish the unauthorized release of your health care information. According to the new regulations, once your information is passed on, the HHS no longer has “jurisdiction” to handle the breach of conduct. Which is a fancy way of saying that they don’t want to deal with any problems that arise from the inevitable database abuse that’s going to occur.

They don't even have to notify you if (or, more accurately, when) your records have been "shared." That's right—your records can be ransacked without your consent and no one will even tell you.

You won't receive an account of when your records were released—or to whom—under the guise of aiding "health care services," including activities related to treatment, payment, or health care operations (a very stretchable definition encompassing nearly anything).

The World Wide Web could become a world wide invasion of privacy

You probably know how easy it is these days to get access your credit report—for anyone to get access to your credit report—via the Internet. Well, give it two or three years, and I'm betting it will be just as quick and easy for anyone who wants to download your medical records right on-line. Goodbye, medical privacy!

So with all this bad news, you're probably thinking "OK, until we get this reversed, I'll just be very, very careful what I say to my doctor from now on." Sorry, but they "gotcha" there, too. According to an official from the American Psychoanalytic Association, the

new rule eliminates all privacy rights retroactively and permits the disclosure of your health information "whether received before or after the compliance date" of this rule.

Help fight against these invasions of privacy by becoming the squeaky wheel

I know all this seems rather grim, to say the least. But you know how the saying goes: The squeaky wheel gets the grease." So maybe, if we all squeak loud enough, we'll be the wheels that get some medical privacy. It certainly can't hurt to try. You can complain to your doctor, hospital, or insurer about privacy breaches. You can complain to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. You can complain loud and long! Just keep in mind that the HHS secretary may or may not investigate the complaint, since the final rule doesn't obligate him to do so (it reads that the secretary "may"—not "shall"—investigate complaints).

What's even worse, they've taken their extreme arrogance under the "privacy" rules so far as to

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Who's behind these "privacy" regulations?

This answer is the only one nowhere to be found in the *Federal Register*. So who exactly is it that wants to release all of your medical information details, including:

- your last Pap smear, pelvic exam, and breast check
- your latest prostate exam
- your sexual relationships (or lack of them)
- every detail of every psychotherapy session you ever had
- your prescriptions, including anti-depressants, tranquilizers, Viagra
- details of your hospitalizations
- every milligram of every vitamin, mineral or herb ever entered in your medical record by anyone
- your genetic information
- anything you ever told your doctor in confidence

If you want to uncover the culprit, you could start by

tracking the activities of the Workgroup for Electronic Data Interchange (WEDI), a group that started pushing for these regulations during the administration of "George I," and succeeded in obtaining them during the administrations of "Wild Bill" and George "Duby" II.

But who runs WEDI? According to the company's web-site (www.wedi.org), WEDI Board members include representatives from the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, the American Association of Health Plans, United Healthcare, Intermountain Health Care, Kaiser Permanente, Wellpoint Health Networks, the American Medical Association, the American Dental Association, the American Hospital Association, the Medical Group Management Association, PriceWaterhouse Coopers, McKesson, the

National Council for Prescription Drug Programs, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the National Association of State Medicaid Directors, and others.

It's an interesting alliance of health care insurance plans, HMOs, hospitals, professional medical and dental associations, government health care bureaucrats, patent medicine ("pharmaceutical") companies, and accountants, who all want to "share" your personal, private medical information.

While they're busily sharing every last bit of your medical information amongst themselves without protecting it from getting out to everyone else, I'm sure they'll tell you they have only your best interests in mind—and that making money and the bottom line has nothing to do with it. Good thing you and I know better...

Is your medical record public property?

(continued from page 3)

specifically eliminate your right to sue.

But be persistent. They won't be able to ignore us forever, when the complaints keep rolling in day after day, week after week, month after month (year after year, if that's what it takes)!

Of course, all this is blatantly unconstitutional. But that hasn't really made any difference to Congress, the president (any of them), or the federal bureaucracy for many years. Both "Demicans" and "Republocrats" have admitted publicly that most of what our federal government does is unconstitutional. And the Supreme Court just helps things along, frequently twisting the plain language of the Constitution into verbal pretzels to justify the most outrageous government actions.

So what can you do?

I hope you and everyone reading this does something! It's the only hope for stopping your personal, private medical information from ultimately being available to the world, without your consent. So I wholeheartedly

encourage you to telephone, write, fax, and e-mail your state representatives and senators—and the president, too! And not just once...over and over and over again. To find out their contact information, visit www.congress.org or call Capitol Advantage at (703)289-4670 or (800)659-8708.

Don't stop there. Copy this article and give it to all your friends. Download it from the *Nutrition & Healing* website, and e-mail it to your entire address book. Write letters to the editor of your local newspaper. Call your favorite radio and television talk show hosts. And refer them to the Institute for Health Freedom at www.forhealthfreedom.org or (202)429-6610 for specific references to the exact portions of the *Federal Register* article containing these outrageous, unbelievable—but entirely true—federal regulations. This is not at all the USA that George Washington, James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and all of our Revolutionary War ancestors fought to establish. And it's up to us to fight for—and hopefully restore—those ideals. **JVW**

Uncover and correct the hidden cause of mysterious, undiagnosed illness with herbal “weed-killers” and “fertilizer”

By Kerry Bone

Hypochondriacs. I'm sure you know at least one. You know who I'm talking about—those people that always seem to be feeling "under the weather." But they look fine. They sound fine. And their doctors never find anything wrong with them. So, most of the time those doctors—and the rest of us—write it off as being all in the person's head. Until it happens to you: You start feeling just plain awful and the feeling continues for days, weeks, maybe even months, but your doctor insists there's nothing wrong. You know you're not a hypochondriac. No, something is definitely wrong—no matter what everyone else thinks.

And you may very well be right.

It may not be an “infection” but it could be causing some surprising —and serious— health concerns

In the August issue of *Nutrition & Healing*, I stressed how rebalancing bowel flora (the "friendly" microorganisms that live in your digestive tract) can be a big help in relieving the uncomfortable, and often disabling, symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome

(IBS). But it's not just people with IBS who can benefit from rebalancing bowel flora. Many times, people who have a "track record" of often feeling unwell, with no concrete diagnosis (in medical-speak, we call it "chronic illness of unspecified origin") may actually be suffering from an imbalance of gut/bowel microflora.

But why didn't the doctor figure that out in the first place, you might wonder? Well, unfortunately, mainstream medicine doesn't consider this sort of imbalance "serious" enough to classify it as an infection.

The truth of the matter is that bowel flora imbalances play a role in all sorts of conditions. In fact, the involvement of bowel flora in autoimmune diseases, like rheumatoid arthritis and ankylosing spondylitis (a painful condition characterized by the joints and bones of the spine fusing together), has been illustrated in various studies.^{1,2} And imbalanced levels of gut microflora may also contribute to such varied conditions as asthma, dermatitis, psoriasis, and ulcerative colitis.³

While rebalancing your flora levels may not eliminate these conditions, it can certainly put you further down the road to feeling better—and away

from that “hypochondriac” accusation!

Gardening for your gut: Correct disease-triggering imbalances with the “weed-killer/fertilizer” approach

There are two commonly used tactics to rebalance bowel flora. One is to replace the missing flora using dietary supplement microorganisms, like Lactobacillus acidophilus, which are similar to those that live in the gut naturally. (These supplements are called probiotics.) The other approach is to take supplements that selectively nourish the healthy bowel flora you do have, encouraging it to multiply. (These supplements are called prebiotics.)

Herbal treatment for gut flora imbalances is compatible with the use of probiotics and prebiotics, but it also provides an additional level of activity. Actually, the protocol I’m going to outline for you uses an “herbal prebiotic.” If you decide to take probiotics too, make sure not to take them at the same time as any of the antimicrobial herbs I’m going to mention. These herbs kill off bacteria, and even though probiotics are “good” bacteria, the herbs don’t know the difference. So, taking them at the same time cancels out the benefits of the probiotics.

The herbal approach I prescribe to my patients is based on the “weed-killer” and “fertilizer” hypothesis. The “weed-killer” consists of using broad-spectrum antimicrobial herbs, which help against bacteria, fungi, and protozoa. Then, the “fertilizer” uses herbal prebiotics to selectively encourage healthy microflora. Basically, the aim is to manipulate your existing microflora to provide a healthier balance.

Your step-by-step guide for balancing gut flora

For two days only of each week (preferably the weekend, since it will be easier to keep track), you should take the antimicrobial herbs throughout the day. Take 450 milligrams of green tea extract and 150 milligrams of grape seed extract along with either fresh garlic (two crushed cloves per day) or an allicin-releasing garlic supplement that contains the equivalent of 2,000 to 5,000 milligrams of fresh garlic (this will most likely be at least 3 to 4 tablets) each day. You can also add 2,000 milligrams of golden seal root, but be sure to take it at least 90 minutes before or after the green tea and grape seed extracts (the tannins in these herbs will bind up the active ingredient, berberine, in the golden seal).

Then you should use the “fertilizer” herbs for the rest of the week. I usually recommend taking 3 teaspoons of slippery elm powder per day. If you prefer capsules, I recommend taking nine 400-500 mg

CLINICAL TIP 107

Pregnenolone: The crucial information that isn’t on the label of this “anti-aging wonder supplement”

You could say that pregnenolone is “the mother of all steroid hormones.” Our bodies make pregnenolone from cholesterol. From there, it’s metabolized into every steroid hormone you can think of (and probably some you’ve never even heard of): progesterone, cortisol, cortisone, all the estrogens, DHEA, testosterone—and that’s just to name a few.

Pregnenolone has actually been available in natural food stores without prescription since the mid-1990s. And judging from some of the hype about it, combined with the great anti-aging race so many people are in, you’d think that everyone over 40 should take it. After all, it seems logical that pregnenolone would be the answer to aging concerns, since it is indeed the “ultimate precursor” for all of the natural, internally produced hormones, and since those signs and symptoms of aging that crop up more and more after you hit 40 are caused by your body’s declining production of those hormones.

Theoretically, taking pregnenolone does make sense, but unfortunately, in practice, it doesn’t tend to work very well. Instead of being evenly metabolized and distributed equally throughout the body, every person who takes pregnenolone seems to have a different (and frequently undesirable) end result. For example, one man took who supplemental pregnenolone found that his body metabolized it almost entirely into estrogens—three times as much estrogen as men should have!

Pregnenolone supplementation can be useful for some people, but please don’t take it without careful, comprehensive follow-up hormone and natural steroid testing! It’s absolutely crucial that both you and your physician know exactly “where the pregnenolone went.”

capsules per day.

You should repeat this protocol for at least six weeks, though in some cases, it may take much longer to rebalance bowel flora—especially when chronic conditions like autoimmune diseases are involved.

Remember, these herbs may not solve your health problems entirely, but taking care of this underlying cause may be the first step in finally solving that “mysterious,” undiagnosed illness—and helping you feel your best again. **KB**

CLINICAL TIP 108

Itching and irony: More news on the common skin irritant that may help you erase psoriasis for good!

What if I told you that one of the most widely known skin irritants—the one that's causing a rash (pun intended!) of complaints in Europe as part of one of their new "Euro" coins—might actually be the key to relieving the unbearable discomforts of psoriasis? No, I haven't "lost it," though I know it sounds hard to believe—especially since there just doesn't seem to be a whole lot of hope for psoriasis sufferers.

After all, psoriasis isn't given much attention by the mainstream medical media. But despite its lack of coverage, psoriasis is much more common and much more serious than you might think. It affects nearly 7 million people in the United States, inflicting thick patches of red skin covered in silvery-white scales that are often itchy and can actually disfigure the patient. There is a plethora of creams and ointments available to treat the symptoms of this disease, but until now, nothing resembling a potential cure existed. Of course, maybe that's because it was "hidden" in just about the last place you'd think to look: the element nickel, which has a well-known reputation as a skin irritant.

I've written about the remarkable effectiveness of this psoriasis therapy before. When it's combined with bromide and taken in tablet form, nickel can be a very effective psoriasis remedy. I admit that, like anything else, this therapy doesn't work every single time, but in many individuals, the psoriasis disappears completely. Other times, it's substantially improved. It's worth trying, as the quantities of nickel and bromide required are quite low and adverse reactions are few.

The originator of low-dose (it's actually low enough to be considered homeopathic) nickel/bromide therapy for psoriasis is dermatologist Steven Smith, M.D., of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Despite nickel's infamy, particularly as a component of jewelry and of one of the "Euro" coins, Dr. Smith says he rarely sees this problem with the sort of internal, low dose tablets he developed for easing psoriasis. I can confirm Dr. Smith's claim: My patients have had very good experiences over several years, with no additional irritation brought on by the nickel.

But before news of low dose nickel/bromide came across my desk, I'd made use of several other natural treatments for psoriasis. Fumaric acid (also called fumarate) made a significant difference for many of my patients. Unfortunately, at the relatively high quantities required, it caused a few people to have low blood sugar reactions. So I was forced to limit its use somewhat.

Just one tablet a day offers over 90 percent relief

Now, Dr. Smith has discovered that when he combines low dose nickel/bromide with low dose fumaric acid, it not only eliminates the adverse blood-sugar effects of the fumaric acid, but it also improves the healing effects of nickel bromide even further. He told me that in a group of 300 individuals with psoriasis, over 90 percent showed moderate to marked improvement with only one 600-milligram tablet daily. He also says that low dose nickel/bromide and fumaric acid treatment has been compatible with any other psoriasis

treatment, including patent medicines and light treatments.

My preliminary experience is that Dr. Smith has "done it again" for those with psoriasis. His treatment protocol can be started even if you're using a patent medication or other treatment. As the nickel/bromide and fumaric acid combination takes effect, the "conventional" (more toxic and dangerous) treatments can gradually be withdrawn.

A few small changes could lead you down a psoriasis-free road

Not to put a damper on all this good news, but you should know that long term natural psoriasis therapy also requires elimination of all alcohol, sugar, and refined food, along with allergy testing, elimination, and desensitization, and in many cases, improvement of digestive function with hydrochloric acid/pepsin and digestive enzymes. Having seen some of the devastating social effects psoriasis can have, I'm inclined to believe that giving up that occasional nightcap (or whatever you might be sensitive to) is well worth the sacrifice, considering the trouble it can cause.

Low dose nickel/bromide with fumaric acid is available as Psorizide® Forte, available through Tahoma Clinic Dispensary, natural food stores, and compounding pharmacies throughout the USA. (Although I am, of course, affiliated with Tahoma Clinic Dispensary, neither the Dispensary or I have any financial connection with Dr. Smith or Lomalux Laboratories.)

Natural Response



Heal cracked, painful heel calluses in as little as three months

Q: In the May issue you discussed heavy heel calluses. I have dry, cracked and occasionally bleeding heels which are painful. Have you discussed this in a past issue? Could you give me some natural therapies to try.

—S.K. Fulton, Missouri

A: Not only are there some remedies you can try, but they're remedies that almost always return heel skin to normal within just three to six months!

First, you need vitamin A (no, not beta-carotene, vitamin A itself). For adults with heavy heel callus, it's quite safe to use 60,000 IU daily until the skin returns to normal, and then cut back to a 25,000 IU daily "maintenance" dose. The best-absorbed type of vitamin A is a water soluble, "micellized" form. Micellization is a technique that turns the molecules of vitamin A into microscopic particles that are much easier for your body to absorb. I usually recommend a brand called Micel-A, which is available at many natural food stores and through the Tahoma Clinic Dispensary.

Since your heels crack and bleed, too, add 30 milligrams of zinc (picolinate) twice daily, and 1 tablespoon of flaxseed oil, twice daily. (Remember that when you supplement with essential fatty acids, like flaxseed oil, you should always accompany it with 400 to 800 IU of vitamin E as "mixed tocopherols." The vitamin E helps prevent the oil from oxidizing too quickly in your body.)

Once your heel skin returns to normal (and with this program, it will!), you can also cut back to "maintenance" dosages of zinc, flaxseed oil, and vitamin E, taking them each just once a day rather than twice. **JWV**

Tinnitus: Tips worth trying for this troublesome, "incurable" condition

Q: Please address the subject of tinnitus in your publication. My M.D. says he knows of nothing we can do. Your thoughts would be of great help...

—D.A., Franklin, North Carolina

A: I'm sorry there's no 100 percent effective cure for you. However, there are a few things to try which often reduce ringing in the ears—and occasionally eliminate it entirely. These include:

- Ginkgo biloba, 80 milligrams of a standardized preparation, three times daily
- Zinc (picolinate) 30 milligrams twice daily, "offset" with 2 milligrams copper, twice daily
- Vitamin B₁₂, 1,000 micrograms injected once or twice weekly, along with 5 milligrams of folic acid each time. (You'll need help from a physician skilled in natural therapies for this. See the box on page 8 for sources that can offer you a referral to one in your area.)

Some individuals have also found that acupuncture can help reduce tinnitus. While I (unfortunately) can't promise that any of these things will be a sure-fire solution, they're all very safe and can help improve your health in other ways too. So go ahead and give them a try—it's certainly worth a shot. **JWV**

Eliminate your need for statin drugs for good—regulate your cholesterol production with natural alternatives

Q: I read your article in Nutrition & Healing about policosanol and its effect on cholesterol. In the case of "statin" drugs, one has to take these

for the rest of your life. Is this the same for policosanol or does this product cure or normalize cholesterol production after a certain period so that it is no longer necessary to take the policosanol?

—A.G., Belgium

A: Most cholesterol is synthesized in the liver, and only a minority of it is derived from dietary sources. If you can adjust what your liver is doing, then it may be possible to discontinue policosanol or any patent medicine being used to regulate and "normalize" cholesterol synthesis.

If you or someone in your family has "insulin resistance" or type 2 diabetes, then following a low carbohydrate diet that eliminates all refined sugar and refined carbohydrates and taking nutrients to regulate insulin production will usually normalize cholesterol production by your liver. In that case, you may be able to discontinue using policosanol or statin drugs. (See the July and August 2001 issues of *Nutrition & Healing* for further details.)

If you don't have either of these problems, then other efforts to normalize liver function may make policosanol unnecessary. Reduction (not total elimination) of saturated fat works for some people who don't have a personal or family history of insulin resistance and/or type 2 diabetes.

There are also many essential nutrients and botanicals that can help, including vitamins C and E, essential fatty acids (especially the omega-3 kind), lipoic acid, milk thistle, globe artichoke, Phyllanthus amarus, dandelion, and any of several Ayurvedic and Chinese herbal "liver combinations"—and this is only a partial list of possibilities!

But if all of this fails, there's really no

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Natural Response

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harm in taking policosanol indefinitely. Unlike statin drugs, policosanol is completely natural and has no dangerous side effects. Safe and effective—not a bad combination! **JVW**

Coumadin may be here to stay, but you can avoid taking it with safe, natural, blood-thinning alternatives

Q: I have been a subscriber to your newsletter for many years, and now I find myself in a quandary. I am 62 and have been diagnosed with chronic atrial fibrillation. I am aware of my increased risk of stroke and have been taking a baby aspirin daily along with vitamin E, ginko biloba, lecithin, fish oil and garlic supplements to keep my blood thin.

Recently, my doctor has been strongly urging me to go on Coumadin. He says that the other supplements are not as effective as Coumadin. But if I start Coumadin, I will have to stop taking the other supplements because they...could result in excess bleeding. But then I won't get the other health benefits from these supplements.

Are you aware of any studies comparing Coumadin with these other supplements that you could refer me (and my doctor) to? There are millions of other people that have atrial fibrillation and are probably as concerned about the side effects of Coumadin as I am.

—R. P. (via e-mail)

A: Coumadin is one of the all-time worst "hangovers" from the "heyday" of patent medications: No matter how

many alternatives there are for it, it just won't go away. It certainly thins the blood, but it does so by "poisoning and killing off" the vitamin K in your body. Over enough time, the near-total lack of vitamin K will (not "could," will) cause osteoporosis, arterial calcification, cognitive malfunction, and many, many other problems.

Unfortunately, clinical studies are expensive ventures, and unless there's a patented substance that has enormous profit potential on the other end of all that pricey research, no one is willing to fork over the money to conduct one. And since vitamins, minerals, and nutrients can't be patented, there just aren't any double-blind, placebo-controlled studies to "prove" how well they can work to replace patent medications (like Coumadin)—without all the negative side effects associated with those patented substances.

But even without the clinical studies to "back it up," there is a very good alternative to Coumadin—one I've been using in my practice for over 30 years with great success: Cod liver oil and other fish oils. Fish oils work by making platelets (the very small element in your blood essential to the clotting process) so slippery that they can't stick together easily to form a clot.

There is a test (called the "platelet aggregation test") that can measure how well your blood is responding to all these anti-clotting measures and help you and your doctor determine exactly how much cod liver (or other fish) oil to take. But, unfortunately, it's hard to find and expensive—usually \$200-\$400 each time. That's why no one taking

aspirin as a blood thinner is ever tested to see if the aspirin is actually doing its job. However, over the years, I've run many of these tests and have found that 2 to 3 tablespoonfuls of cod liver oil daily were always enough—and not too much—to do the job.

Remember: Whenever you take supplemental oils or essential fatty acids, always take extra vitamin E, as mixed tocopherols, to prevent the oils from oxidizing too rapidly in your body. Take 800-1,000 IU of vitamin E with 2 to 3 tablespoons of cod liver oil each day. And to minimize any gastrointestinal upset, split the cod liver oil into two or three doses. It's not very tasty stuff, so if necessary, you can blend it with rice or almond milk.

As an added bonus to the natural, side-effect free blood thinning, cod liver oil and other fish oils help build bone, prevent osteoporosis, prevent atherosclerotic plaque build-up, and improve cognitive function—all the things that Coumadin causes! And they also help reduce cardiovascular inflammation (an independent cardiovascular risk factor) without putting you at risk for gastrointestinal bleeding like aspirin, the other widely accepted blood thinner.

Of course, it's never wise to switch from Coumadin to cod liver oil without the advice of a physician skilled and knowledgeable in nutritional and natural medicine; to find one, see the resources section below. **JVW**

Meet Dr. Wright and hear his secrets to anti-aging!

Dr. Wright will be speaking at an anti-aging conference in Phoenix on October 26, 2002. To learn more about this and lots of other crucial health info, log-on to the *Nutrition & Healing* website.

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